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Library Report, May 1927

In June 1926 Miss G. Jackson resigned her position on the Library staff, and Miss Jean Miller was appointed in September. This left the Library staff at the same strength as previously, but the necessity of allotting one of the assistants to the Medical Library for full time during the term, and for part time during the summer, owing to the growing use being made of the Medical Library, made it necessary to employ for part time the help of two senior students. This expedient was on the whole satisfactory, but had its inconvenience, as the preoccupation of the students with their studies made it advisable to release them a month before the end of the term. As there is a very heavy movement of books in the last month, this threw additional work on the regular staff, and I wish to commend Miss Richards for her faithful and efficient work through that period.

Then accession number at this date stands at 30,606, an increase of 1885 volumes since last year. There have been no additions so notable as to call for remark, except that by a stroke of fortune we have been able to secure a long-wanted thick paper Britannica at a price that satisfied even a Scotch librarian, and had the further fortune to run across 46 volumes of quite scarce Early Parliamentary Records of Canada, and get

The binding programme has been continued to the great benefit of the library, and the binder has given complete satisfaction.

Inter-library loan facilities have been largely used during the year, with the change that we find it better in many cases to secure a photostat copy of wanted articles, rather than have the limited use of the volumes containing them.

To make room for expansion of some of the teaching departments, the Agricultural Reading Room was moved in the fall from the North to the South Laboratory.

The Library property is at present housed in five different places; this creates no little difficulty in keeping touch with the movement of books, and does not make it easy to control the books. This however is probably not avoidable until it becomes possible to have a Library building.

The addition of some 350 feet of shelving to the stack to accommodate the new books has further slightly reduced the study room, although in other ways the books are more conveniently placed for student use. We have almost reached the limit of encroachment on our floor space for stacks, but can see our way to handle the books that arrive for the next few years without much further reduction of sitting room, so that any trouble is likely to come rather from an increase of readers than from reduction of room in the near future.

In this matter, it is notable that so small an increase of student readers as five per-cent of the student body would at

once make the library situation acute. At present there are periods nearly every morning during the term when our room is too full for the comfort of students, and on occasions students have been unable to secure a seat. If only fifty additional students began to read for an hour a day in the reading room, our accommodation would be quite unable to cope with them.

From many conversations and consultations with students, I am convinced that the library could be made of vastly greater service and interest to them. We have taken the freshman class in groups through the library at the beginning of the term, but but it would be infinitely better if each new student were given a ten minute appointment with the librarian during the first weeks of the term. This would give the librarian an opportunity of introducing the student to the working part of the library, and, -what in my opinion is equally important,- would lead naturally to discovery of lines of reading which would broaden out the students interests. It is worth noting that, at the end of this term, several students whom I had come to know well enough to talk with about reading came to ask about books they should buy as a start for a small personal collection, and one left me a commission to send him at any time any book I thought he should read, at his expense. Many students reach the end of their career at the University without much contact with the class of books that form the most valuable private collection, and I am quite sure that if the librarian could get into touch with them earlier, they would do a great deal of thoroughly sound reading during their University years.

This year a group of lady students came to me for help in

choosing books to read together in a little group for half an hour after dinner, before the evening's work, and on my advice read one of Sheridan's plays, each taking the part of one of the characters. They came back for more, having thoroughly enjoyed the Sheridan, and read through Maria Chandelaine, and Rivard's 'Chez Nous'. The ten students came to supper with my wife and me, and hope next year very quietly, and without advertisement, to divide into three groups, and bring in others into the little reading circles. I have undertaken to have books selected, and cheap editions enough to keep the groups going next year. It will not, I think be denied that the influence of such a spontaneous movement is all to the good. It gave me a thrill of pleasure to find the group calling each other by the names of the characters they had taken.

It appears, further, that great assistance could be given to students who have essays, or definite pieces of work to undertake. Too often we only know when it is not easy to assemble the material required, and if it were at all feasible for the librarian to be supplied in time with a note of what work the senior students especially were on the point of entering on, much more could be done for them. We have no facilities for allotting table room for specified times to such students, but much could be done by holding for them the books required, and showing them to the best of our ability what resources the library has to help them. It would also be possible on occasion to procure a much wanted book, but at present we only know when it is as a rule impossible to get what is wanted in time. There is no doubt in my mind but that such service would greatly increase the use of the library, and would save many students

a good deal of anxiety over the problem of finding at the right time what material they require. This would occupy a great deal of the librarian's time, and of course no man could meet all needs perfectly.

It is worth recording that every now and then students come to ask for a book to read to take their minds off their work for an hour or two. Many of the friendships I have formed with students have begun in this way, and students are so grateful for guidance to readable books that it would be time well spent to try to discover the students who are open to read, say half a dozen good books in odd moments during the session. There is a readily cultivable field here, for many students express the regret when they come to say good-bye to the library that they did not take the chance of making a wider acquaintance with good books in general, and that they did not do more browsing among books worth knowing while access was open to them.

Not much can be accomplished by approaching students in the mass to stimulate their interest in reading widely, but I feel increasingly that the only limits to the usefulness of friendly contact with students individually are the limits of a librarian's knowledge of the inside of the books in the library, of his patience in finding out what will stimulate and help each student, and of his catholicity of taste, which has to be wide enough to recommend with equal enthusiasm 'The Trial of Deacon Brødio' or Wegener's 'Movement of Continents' as the one and only book for a student to dip into over the week-end.

There is nothing quixotic or impractical in the ideas here suggested for making the library of greater interest and use to

the students, so that it becomes more a part of their lives. After the first interview with new students, which should be compulsory, everything would depend on the friendliness and helpfulness of the relationship formed. That the response on the students' part would be completely satisfactory I do not doubt, and I confess to a constant, and sometimes painful, hankering for freedom to do such work among them.

May 12th., 1927

D.E.Cameron,
Librarian.

